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UNCLAS LAGOS 001851

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SOWING THE BEANS OF HOPE

1. Summary: The Shagamus of Ogun State have for many years grown only kola nuts, and sold them only to Hausas in northern Nigeria. Dr. Gabriel Ogunmola, the President of the Nigeria Academy of Science, recently told us of a hands-on, grassroots success: showing the Shagamus near his university in Ogun State how to escape from generations-old practices of dependency and resentment stemming from this limited agricultural role. His approach holds promise of replication in other areas. End summary.

2. According to Ogumola, the Shagamus were unhappy with what they perceived to be their dependency on the Hausa market in the north and encroachment on their livelihood by the Hausas in their area. Professor Ogunmola thought he saw a resolution to the problem in showing the Shagamus how to diversify their crops and gain more control over their lives.

3. He prepared a demonstration project using a borrowed plot of land. The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), a research facility, showed the famers a variety of products that could result from diversified planting relying heavily on soya beans, but also cassava and maize. Farmers learned that they could make soya flour, beer, and milk, among other products. Representatives of the Agriculture Credit Bank, impressed with the results and the community's interest, offered to open bank accounts for any farmer with N500. These new accounts entitle farmers to be considered for bank loans. The State's Commissioner of Industry offered to work with Professor Ogunmola and the farmers to produce soya milk for sale.

4. At the end of the program, this group of 100 mostly illiterate famers were the proud recipients of printed certificates attesting to their participation in the program. The project has now been turned over to the community to run and there are plans for follow-up demonstrations.

5. Comment: We find it interesting that a leading member of Nigeria's intellectual elite took the initiative to launch a grass-roots community project - one outside of his field, no less; Ogunmola is a chemist, not an agricultural specialist. The project had no outside funding and required some ingenuity and improvisation to get off the ground. Few of the farmers involved could afford the N1000 (\$7.75) per family it cost to participate, so he browbeat friends and acquaintances into sponsoring several farmers each. Ogunmola hopes this was not just a one-off project; he is now looking for linkages with U.S. sponsors for follow-on projects elsewhere. End comment.

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